



70: I think we're alone now by cali-chan

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I think we're alone now. PG, fluff/fam, Mike/Eleven, two weeks post S2 climax. (Spoilers ahoy!)

"Listen, I'm not supposed to leave you two alone here. Hopper will have my head if he finds out, so just... behave, okay?"

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Two weeks had passed since the gate was closed, and things felt like they were going back to normal— a-year-ago normal, that is, with the one major difference of El being back in his life.

The first few days had been weird, what with El spending at minimum eighteen hours a day in bed so she could get her strength back, Will skipping school for a bit longer so he could recuperate from his ordeal and get the ugly burn on his side tended to, and the small, private service they held for Bob, and later Barbara's. It still felt a bit like even though they'd won, even though it was *over*, the cloud of grief still hung over the entire group like a heavy weight. Mike knew better than to disrespect that solemnity; after all, he'd been trapped in his own grief for three hundred and fifty-three days.

As the days went by, however, the cloud lifted, little by little. For some it was easier than for others— Will's mom was still noticeably sad, Steve seemed more withdrawn than usual (not that Mike had ever really been that close to him), and the Chief's work seemed to get more hectic than normal once the military descended on Hawkins for the execution of the usual cover-up tactics. Mike didn't even care that once again they were being forced to keep all these huge secrets. All he cared about was that Will now seemed a little bit freer, a little less fearful than he had been all year; and Eleven was back by his side, safe and sound and with a home and a family of her own.

Now that it was decided she would be staying permanently in the cabin with Hopper, El had decided it was time to make her room truly *her* room, with all her favorite things surrounding her, a place

where she could spend her time in safety and warmth, collecting memories of all her friends and loved ones— her Mama, Hopper, Joyce, Mike and the boys, everyone she'd come to know in Hawkins and everyone who had helped her along the way.

Hopper didn't want them to paint the walls, so the previous weekend, Nancy had managed to con some money out of him to go and buy El some stuff to decorate her room; stuff of her own that *weren't* old lumberjack hand-me-downs and 30-year-old wartime tech from God-knows-where. Hopper was so desperate for any help from anyone who actually knew how to raise a teenager— or *was* a teenager, in Nancy's case— that he shelled out the money immediately, much to Mike's eternal befuddlement. (How did Nancy *do* that? He was a good student, too, but that didn't give him the ability to Jedi mind trick every adult around).

So now El had ended up with new, breezier curtains, a more functional vanity with a large mirror, colorful paintings hanging from the walls, a few sets of bedding with a bit more personality to them, several corkboards and hanger lines for organizing pictures and knickknacks, decorative letters that spelled out her name— her *real* name, Jane— on the wall near the window, a whole bunch of accessories for her to use on her growing hair, and a closetful of age-appropriate (and not punk-like in the slightest) clothes. Though she'd looked good in the punk getup she had on the day she closed the gate — well, as far as Mike was concerned, she would look good in anything— she had decided that was a style for very particular occasions and that for the day-to-day, she preferred comfier, less... dramatic clothes. Nancy was more than happy to oblige.

She'd also bought El a dress for the Snow Ball, but Mike wasn't allowed to see that one.

("You *did* ask her to the Snow Ball, right?" Nancy had asked him in a harsh whisper as El took the box with the dress into her room, so she could put it in the closet.

"Uh," was Mike's eloquent answer because, erm, he *had*, but that was... the previous year? Did that even still count? He'd just assumed... Oh no, did he have to ask her again?

His sister frowned at his [obviously panicked] expression. "Mike! Seriously?" she hissed at him, but that was as far as she got before Eleven called her for help with something).

That had been a few days ago, and now they were almost done. The guys and Max had wanted to help as well, but none of them had been able to get out much in the afternoons; Lucas and Max were both grounded for sneaking out of their homes and spending the night elsewhere without warning their parents, Dustin's mom demanded that he spend more time at home to comfort her through the loss of her beloved Mews, and Will had a ton of homework to catch up on. Also, since El still technically had to stay in hiding, they couldn't very well descend on the cabin in a large group, and even if only one person visited, they had to take special measures to get there undetected, like parking their cars in a not-quite-nearby clearing and taking the long way 'round to the cabin.

Fortunately for Nancy and Mike, whatever mid-life-crisis, hands-off-parenting phase Karen was on these days was still in effect, so most of the time it was just the two of them, with an appearance by Jonathan every once in a while to help with the handy stuff.

(Mike didn't even want to ask what *that* was all about— all he knew was that Nancy wasn't dating Steve anymore, and now Steve was hanging out with Dustin more than any high school senior ever should, really).

Today it was just the three of them. Jonathan apparently had a test to study for, but he'd sent over with Nancy a box of photos he'd taken over the years. While Nancy arranged ribbons and postcards and pins up on the corkboards, Mike and Eleven sat on the floor by El's bed, looking through the photos— some from all the way when the boys were little, some as recent as the previous week— so that El could choose her favorites and pin them on her walls. Every few minutes she levitated a photo over to Nancy, who put it up on the wall with a chuckle.

Eleven leaned closer, showing him a photo so he'd explain what was happening in it, and Mike couldn't help but laugh. "That's from back in the fourth grade," he signaled at the image of the four of them standing in front of the bumper cars ride, the lights of the Ferris

wheel shining in the background. They all had brilliant smiles on their faces— well, all but one. "Dustin used to smile like this all the time," he pursed his lips tightly to demonstrate before continuing, "so that people wouldn't notice his teeth hadn't come in yet. But it was pointless, 'cause pretty much everybody at school already knew. He stopped doing it after a while," he finished with a shake of his head.

"Where is it?" El asked, her eyes fixated on the brightly-colored rides. Mike recognized the glint in her eye she got when something she'd never encountered before piqued her attention.

"That's the county fair," he explained easily. "It's this big event where people from all over the county come to sell farm animals, crops or farming equipment. But there's also an amusement park with lots of cool rides you can go on. We can take you when the fair opens next summer."

She nodded enthusiastically. "Sounds fun."

He quickly agreed. "It is fun." He was about to explain more about the rides when they heard Nancy sigh, sounding frustrated. "What is it?" he asked, noting that his sister was just standing there, hands on her hips, glaring at the corkboard she just decorated like it offended her.

"I just... I thought I had brought a second bag of ribbons with me..." She was mumbling to herself more than talking to them, like she would do sometimes when their mother asked him to go tell her something and he found her studying. She turned on her heels and went to check the corner of the room where she had dumped her stuff upon arrival, crouching down to see if maybe the missing bag was there.

After a minute or so of searching, she stood up with a huff. "I probably just left it at home. I'll go pick it up and be back in a bit." She shouldered her purse and picked her mom's car keys up from the floor.

Mike perked up immediately at the prospect of he and Eleven getting some alone time together for once. "Yeah! Yeah, you should definitely go get it. Better to get this picture board thing done today, right?"

Nancy put a hand on her hip and, raising one perfectly leveled eyebrow, gave Mike a pointed "I know what you're doing" look. "Eager, much?" she quipped, obviously knowing exactly what was going through Mike's mind. "Listen, I'm not supposed to leave you two alone here. Hopper will have my head if he finds out, so just... behave, okay?"

Hopper had ostensibly instituted that rule the first time they came over to visit to make sure there was always an "adult" around (if Nancy and Jonathan counted as such) in case of any danger, but the way he had looked at Mike when he said it made him feel like he wouldn't be repeating that rule to any of his other friends— nope, that one was for Mike in *particular*, and Nancy probably knew that, too.

Eleven looked clueless as to what she was implying, but Mike was sure his own cheeks were flaming so he waved his hand impatiently in Nancy's direction. "Will you just go already?" he insisted with a groan.

Nancy rolled her eyes. "Fine. I'll be back in twenty." She made her way out of the room and out the door, Mike glaring at her back as she went. What did she even think they were going to do, anyway? They'd only known each other for like a week before they were separated for a whole year. They'd barely even kissed.

Eleven locked the door with her powers from where she sat, then turned to him with a frown. "Behave, how?"

Mike shook his head quickly. "Nothing. She's just being annoying."

"Teasing?" El asked, using a word she had only learned recently. Oh, she'd known what teasing *was*— hard not to when living with Chief Hopper for so long— she just hadn't known there was a word for it.

"Yeah," Mike confirmed with a shrug. "Just ignore her." They continued browsing through the pictures for a couple of minutes before Mike leaned back against the side of El's bed and looked around. "Are you sure you're okay with Nancy doing this? You can say no, you know," he offered. He wanted El to be comfortable in her new home and have everything she wanted in there.

And sure, she had moved on from her (incredibly brief) punk phase, and decided she enjoyed a lot of the things normal girls her age enjoyed, but that didn't mean Nancy had to take over. He didn't want El's room to end up looking like Nancy's— Nancy's room looked like Barbie had thrown up all over it.

To his relief, El shrugged. "I like it," she replied with a small smile. She looked down at the picture at the top of the small stack she held in her hands. "Max?" she wondered aloud with a frown, showing Mike the picture.

Mike looked at it and chuckled. "Yeah, that's from the night you came back," he pointed out. The picture showed Max leaning over Billy's face with a marker in her hand. She'd been about to draw something disgusting on her knocked-out stepbrother's face, but then she thought better about it; she'd finally managed to get one up on Billy for once, and she didn't want to make him angry all over again by embarrassing him like that. It was a permanent marker, after all.

Dustin, who had "borrowed" Jonathan's camera to "document" what he was calling "the biggest scientific discovery since evolution" (that is, the demo-dog they had shoved into the Byers' fridge), snapped a picture right before Max pulled back. The picture was all crooked because... well, Dustin wasn't a very good photographer.

As he lifted his gaze from the photo, he saw that El was looking at him with a worried expression, which alarmed him a little bit. "Hey, what's wrong?"

She dodged his gaze, almost like she was ashamed. "I went... to school," she revealed eventually in a low mumble. "Pushed Max. With my powers."

Mike was about to ask when Hopper had allowed her out, but then his eyes widened as he remembered. "I knew that was you!" he said, grinning a little at the fact that he'd been correct in his guess. Then he frowned. "But... why did you push her? And why did you leave? I looked for you, we could've..." His voice trailed off as he thought of how different things could've been if he'd seen Eleven that day. If only he'd been a little bit faster.

She shrugged again in response to his questions. "You were having fun."

"What?" the exclamation left his mouth before he could even stop himself. "I wasn't." He couldn't even remember what he and Max had been talking about that day— all thoughts of anything other than El had fled his mind the second he realized she could probably be there, close to where he was, after a full year of separation.

She looked up at him, still seeming troubled. She raised a hand and cupped his jaw softly, touching the corner of his lips with her thumb. "Smiling."

He shook his head, pulling El's hand away from his face, but he didn't let go of it. "Because she was being ridiculous," he retorted. That much he did remember. She'd been trying to convince him to let her be a part of their party, pretty much trying to annoy him into accepting.

He was going to relay that information to El when a thought occurred to him: Was she... had she been jealous? Of *Max*? "El..." he started. "You... you know I don't like Max like *that*, right?" She dodged his eyes. He cradled her hand between both of his to get her attention. "Hey," he tried to catch her gaze again. "Max is cool. She's our friend now. I like her as a friend, but I don't like her like that. Not like I..." He swallowed hard. "Not like I like you."

Her eyes widened, hearing those words. "Really?"

"Yes," he reassured her, earnest. "I didn't even like Max at all in the beginning. The guys wanted her to be a part of our party and it made me so mad, because... I thought they were trying to replace you," he admitted sadly. "I didn't want a new party member. I just wanted you to come back."

"Back now," she said, moving slightly closer to him as she pulled her hands away from him to cradle his face delicately. He'd noticed she was touching him a lot more than she used to now that she came back... not that he minded, of course. He was sure it was just an aftereffect of their separation, that need to reassure herself that he really *was* right there with her— he understood it because he felt that

way as well.

Two weeks had gone by, but he still couldn't shake the feeling that one day he would wake up with a start in her blanket fort in his basement, tear tracks running down his cheeks, and it would all turn out to be a dream, it would turn out that she wasn't really back. Feeling her closeness, hugging her, holding her hand, it all helped hold that insidious feeling at bay.

"Yeah, but I didn't know that." He leaned his forehead against hers. "I... I missed you so much while you were away," he admitted in a low tone. "I was sad all the time. I mean, you probably already know that," he added, remembering that she'd been keeping tabs on him psychically through their separation. "But I think... that day was probably the first time I smiled in a really long time." He pulled back slightly, sitting up straighter, trying to push back the old ghost of loneliness that had accompanied his every step for the better part of a year.

El's expression became sad again. "I'm sorry," she said, wringing her hands in her lap.

"No, no. It's not your fault, El," he was quick to assure her, grabbing her wrist softly to keep her from retreating completely. "Don't ever think it was your fault. Hopper asked you to stay away, and, well... he did it to protect you. It was the right thing to do. I'd rather you be safe, even if it means I can't see you that often." Time and many moments spent with El since had helped Mike understand Hopper's motivations a little bit better. He wasn't bitter about it anymore. The Chief cared about El, too, and only wanted to protect her.

Of course, just because he understood it now didn't mean he had to like it. That's why he'd decided to spend as much time as humanly possible with El until she was finally allowed out like a regular kid.

She nodded, turning her hand over so that she could entwine her fingers with his again. "Have to apologize. To Max."

"For pushing her off her skateboard with your mind?" he asked, pulling one of El's hands open so he could sneak a curious look at her palm. His mom believed all that crap she saw on television about

reading people's palms to tell the future— Mike didn't like it because it was so unscientific, he just found it silly, but for some reason he found El's hands entirely too interesting.

El nodded, then paused. "And later. She tried to be friends. Was mean to her," she revealed, a little sheepish.

Mike looked up from her hand and stared at her face instead, his eyebrows climbing high under his fringe. That was surprising. Sure, El had a sassy side to her (one that he personally loved), but he'd never known her to be mean to anyone who wasn't directly threatening her or her friends. (Well, except Dustin that one time—but he was trying to make her do tricks like a show dog, so as far as Mike was concerned, he deserved every bit of her contempt). This thing with Max must've really upset her.

He couldn't stop the corners of his mouth from crinkling up, though. It was kind of awesome that she cared so much about him that she'd get jealous when he hung out with another girl. Of course, he'd do his best to remind her as much as he could that she was special to him, that no other girl could ever come close, but it still made his chest feel light that her feelings for him were that strong. He chuckled. "I guess we both owe Max an apology, then, right?"

"Yes," Eleven agreed with a nod, and Mike looked down at the photo that started this entire conversation once again before tossing it in their "goes on the corkboard" pile. He made a mental note to ask Max at school tomorrow when her grounding was over, so maybe she could come over one afternoon and they could apologize properly. He had a feeling El and Max could become great friends.

He was still thinking about this when he felt her tug at his hand. "Mike?"

He turned to her again; she was still sitting very close, staring at him with those bright, chocolate-colored eyes. "Yeah?"

She smiled at him— that soft, small smile that he loved. "I missed you, too."

Almost involuntarily he smiled back, and was about to tell her

something else, when she leaned forward and softly pressed her lips against his.

It was only their second kiss and it felt very different from the first. Not just because she'd been the one to initiate it this time, but also because there were no stressful circumstances, no nervousness, no awkwardness. She just kissed him because she wanted to, because she cared about him, because they were finally together again and so she *could*, and he was more than happy to reciprocate all those emotions and then some.

Eleven pulled back and they grinned at each other like idiots for a heartbeat— at least until someone knocked on the door, the sound making both of them jump about a foot in the air.

They quickly realized it was the secret knock and so they didn't have any reason to be scared, so Mike nodded at El to unlock the door with her powers. It was probably Nancy coming back with the ribbons, anyway, so it wasn't a big deal.

Except the person who crossed the doorway was not Nancy but Chief Hopper, turning to close the door with one hand while in the other one he carried a grocery-store plastic bag with something inside that looked like a pint-sized container. "Hey, kid, I got a surprise for you," he called out with his back to them, and Mike rushed to stand up and move at least two feet away from El before he could— oops, too late.

"Wheeler," the Chief glared at him none too subtly. "Where's your chaperone?"

"Oh, um, Nancy had to pick something up at home," he explained as he walked out of El's room, the girl's steps also quick at his heels. "She should be getting back soon," he added, hoping he sounded convincing, and thanking fate that Hopper hadn't come in one minute earlier.

"Uh-huh." Hopper was frowning so hard, his eyebrows were forming a deep V on his forehead. Of course, that was pretty much the Chief's default expression, but it didn't stop Mike from tensing up. "And didn't I tell you there always had to be an adult around during visits?" Once again that "you" could be taken as meaning everyone,

but Mike had a feeling the comment was directed very specifically at him.

"We behaved," El retorted as she walked past Mike and came up to Hopper's side, sounding entirely too collected and matter-of-fact. Mike wasn't sure if she was trying to cover up what had just happened between them a minute ago, or if she truly didn't know that kissing would be a *big* no-no as far as the Chief was concerned when it came to proper behavior when no adults were present. Either way, it didn't help Mike relax in the slightest. "Ice cream?" she asked, taking the plastic bag out of Hopper's hand and walking over to their small dining table with her newfound treasure.

"Yeah. It was Callahan's birthday today and they had some Rocky Road left over," Hopper replied, but he wasn't looking at El— nope, he was still glaring at Mike. The boy gulped.

"All melty," Eleven commented as she took the lid off the ice cream container. She ran to the cupboards to get a couple of mismatched cups and some spoons. Since Hopper hadn't commented on this, he assumed the Chief had agreed to let her have dessert before dinner just this once. "Mike, you want ice cream?" the girl asked.

He snapped his terrified gaze away from the Chief and nodded. "Uh, yeah." He moved toward the table and tried not to think too hard about Hopper's glare pinpricking at the back of his neck. El served three scoops in the larger cup, which they would share, and a couple scoops on the smaller cup, for Hopper. She put what little was left in the container back inside the freezer, in case Nancy wanted some when she came back.

The Chief eventually took off his jacket and hat with a groan, leaving them on the table, and pulled up a stool so he could sit at the table with them. "Next time Nancy or Jonathan have to leave you alone, the bedroom door stays open, okay?"

El paused with the spoon halfway to her mouth. "Door *was* open," she pointed out in that blunt way of hers. Mike stayed quiet, limiting his input to switching his gaze between the two of them. He'd stood up to Hopper before, called him out on his mistakes and hypocrisy when his emotions got the better of him, but the Chief was also El's

guardian and, well, if El was going to be living with him permanently, then Mike wanted him to like him. At least he'd somewhat acknowledged that there might be a next time when he and El could be alone together in the cabin. He'd take what he could get.

"Just nod your head and go with it for once in your life, would you?" Hopper threw back with a long-suffering groan, and Mike almost had to smile. El's rapport with Hopper was something else, both snippier and warmer than his own with either of his parents. It was almost entertaining to watch.

She playfully narrowed her eyes at him, but then shrugged. "Okay." She went back to happily eating her ice cream and Mike couldn't help but stare like a total wastoid. She'd had so few moments like these in her life, so few opportunities to be childlike and carefree and gleeful, and Mike wanted to do everything in his admittedly limited power to ensure that she felt like this all the time. He wanted her to be happy, always.

He was rudely pulled out of his thoughts when he felt Hopper poke him in the arm with the handle of his spoon. "She's gonna eat the whole thing," the older man pointed out before taking the spoon to his mouth, and Mike realized he hadn't taken one spoonful of the chocolatey dessert, and El was almost done with the whole cup. She heard Hopper's comment and paused, looking at Mike sheepishly as she pushed the half-empty cup closer to him.

He had a spoonful or two but then passed the cup back to El, knowing she was getting more enjoyment out of the treat than he was, anyway. Hopper watched them closely as he finished his own.

Once she was done with the ice cream, El went into great detail about all the decorations they'd put up in her room already, with Hopper nodding and humming his approval where necessary, and discussed what they still had planned for the next day. When Nancy finally returned, they went back to the room to finish up before the Wheeler siblings bid the Chief and his ward goodbye for the night.

El waved at them from the window.

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Notes: That second season, amirite? -squeals- I love Mike and Eleven's relationship, and I love Hopper and Eleven's relationship, and I love Hopper being the typical overprotective dad who tries to scare the suitors away, et donc voilà. :) Consider this a celebration that my previous two stories didn't get completely jossed last Friday (Mike could still have picked up the guitar at some point and just not have told anybody, you never know).

Also, one of the (very few) things that bugged me about the season was that neither Eleven nor Mike ever apologized to Max, and I really wanted to see them become friends— although it did crack me up that even without agreeing on this beforehand, they both just happened to dislike her for reasons that had nothing whatsoever to do with Max herself. I may or may not write out the apology scene at some point, but for the moment I wanted to at least touch upon it on this one.

PS: I'm aware that Tiffany's version of the title song didn't come out until 1987 but... come on, guys. It was too good not to use.